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Viewing cable 08KUALALUMPUR847, PM ABDULLAH REGROUPS, REAFFIRMS UMNO ELECTION PLAN

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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#08KUALALUMPUR847.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08KUALALUMPUR847	2008-09-24 09:29	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kuala Lumpur

Appears in these articles:

<http://malaysia-today.net/mtcolumns/42557-wikileaks-pm-abdullah-regroups-reaffirms-umno-election-plan->

VZCZCXRO0328
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHKL #0847/01 2680929
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 240929Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1693
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0144
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2514
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2632
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000847

SIPDIS

FOR EAP, EAP/MTS AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2028

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: PM ABDULLAH REGROUPS, REAFFIRMS UMNO ELECTION PLAN

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 833 - SEPT 18 SETBACK
[¶](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 821 - ABDULLAH TAKES DEFENSE MINISTRY
[¶](#)C. KUALA LUMPUR 815 - SEPT 16 ANTI-CLIMAX
[¶](#)D. KUALA LUMPUR 810 - UPROAR OVER ISA

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark, reason 1.4 (b and d).

Summary and Comment

[¶](#)1. (C) Embattled Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi claimed support from state-level officials of his ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO) for his re-nomination as party president, in an effort to bounce back after some national UMNO leaders on September 18 urged the PM not to contest in the December party poll. Subsequently, Abdullah again affirmed his commitment to seek reelection together with Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, while other senior UMNO leaders reiterated calls for Abdullah to step down. On September 22, Anwar's camp spread news that the Opposition leader would meet the King the following day; we have no information to suggest such a meeting took place. PM Abdullah said reports that he was in indirect talks with Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim over a transfer of power were "rubbish;" Anwar also issued a public denial and advocated caution.

[¶](#)2. (C) Comment: Rapidly approaching the Muslim holiday period beginning October 1-2, and the October 9 start of the party's divisional meetings, the UMNO leadership crisis remains critical and unresolved. Reports of Anwar Ibrahim meeting the King or opening up a third-party channel to negotiate with PM Abdullah do not appear credible. Anwar's most recent pronouncements sound a cautious tone and avoid setting deadlines for bringing down Abdullah's government, and it is unclear how far Anwar Ibrahim can push his agenda before the end of September. End Summary and Comment.

Abdullah Claims State-Level Backing

[¶](#)3. (SBU) PM Abdullah traveled to Perak and Kelantan states and held meetings with some UMNO state-level leaders over the September 20-21 weekend in an attempt to regroup support for his re-nomination as UMNO president following his setback in the heated UMNO Supreme Council meeting on September 18. (Note: Some prominent UMNO national leaders during the September 18 meeting reportedly warned Abdullah he would not get sufficient nominations from the UMNO party divisions and urged him not to seek reelection in the December party polls, ref A. End Note.) On September 23, Abdullah held a late night meeting with the UMNO liaison chiefs from nine states, with Johor, Sabah and Terengganu not represented (along with Sarawak, which does not have an UMNO branch). Following the meeting, a senior aide to Abdullah told reporters that the Prime Minister had received the strong endorsement of the party's state chiefs for his transition plan, which involves PM Abdullah and DPM Najib's reelection in December, and transfer of power from Abdullah to Najib by June 2010. Other UMNO participants in the meeting noted a "unanimous" decision in favor of the 2010 transition plan.

[¶](#)4. (C) Comment: By going to the state level, and reporting strong endorsement from state leaders, Abdullah sought to counter criticism from national leaders that he would not receive sufficient backing for his reelection. State liaison chiefs are appointed by the party president -- Abdullah -- and thus largely beholden to him, but they also exercise important political power among their respective state's party divisions. End Comment.

[¶](#)5. (SBU) After remaining awkwardly quiet on September 19, the Prime Minister's spin machine operating through the mainstream media and some on-line news portals, like The

Malaysian Insider, started up again on September 20. Reporting from government sources and associated commentary reaffirmed that Abdullah was moving ahead with the joint ticket with Najib, and that the transition plan remained on track and was not likely to be derailed.

Open UMNO Split Continues

¶6. (SBU) As Abdullah reaffirmed his transition plan and intention to seek reelection, senior UMNO leaders Muhyiddin Yassin and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah adamantly stuck to their positions that Abdullah should step down by December. On September 23, Razaleigh issued a lengthy condemnation of UMNO's undemocratic power politics and the party's failure to reform: "We cannot afford to allow these disturbing trends to play out their destructive course while we suffer a de facto leadership vacuum..." (full text forwarded to EAP/MTS).

DPM Najib, who departs the evening of September 24 for the UN General Assembly, largely avoided comment, feeding local perceptions that he is attempting to keep some room open to receive party nominations for president, possibly with Muhyiddin as his number two. Former Prime Minister Mahathir continued his attacks against Abdullah, and heaped blame on Najib for facilitating Abdullah's continuation in office.

Opposition Rumors; Anwar's Caution

¶7. (C) Beginning September 22, Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's camp circulated two streams of rumor in what - in the absence of more information - appears to be a continuation of psychological warfare against UMNO and the National Front (BN) government. On September 22, Anwar advisor Khalid Jaafar whispered to us during a reception at the Ambassador's Residence that Anwar would meet the King on September 23 to discuss the parliamentary majority that Anwar alleges he now has and the formation of a new government. Other rumors of Anwar meeting with the King and other Royals persist in Kuala Lumpur.

¶8. (C) On September 23, Tian Chua, Anwar's information chief, publicly announced that the Opposition had opened negotiations with Prime Minister Abdullah through a third-party channel. PM Abdullah immediately dismissed this claim, calling it "rubbish." Anwar later issued a statement referring to Tian Chua's remarks as "misinformed." Avoiding setting any new deadlines for toppling the government, Anwar in his statement said, "We will proceed cautiously towards our goals and we agree neither to be provoked into hasty action nor to take an irresponsible approach that would lead to instability and greater uncertainty in the country." (Comment: Earlier on September 23, the GOM confirmed two years detention without trial under the Internal Security Act for controversial blogger Raja Petra, septel. Opposition leaders continue to tell us that they seek to avoid creating a pretext for the government to arrest them under the ISA. End Comment.)

RAPSON